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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Louisiana's Nunez Community College (NCC) participated in the Exploring America's Communities project sponsored by the American Association of Community Colleges. The project works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. NCC's primary goal was centered on providing its community with opportunities to learn about the cultural diversity which exists in its midst and the commonalties which bind the people of diverse cultures together. NCC had three main objectives for its program: incorporating a greater emphasis on cultural diversity in existing courses; providing opportunities for students to be exposed to various cultures by scheduling curriculum-related field trips and visits to various activities throughout the area; and including service-learning in the college's curriculum. A Multicultural Advisory Committee, whose tasks included recommending to the project team activities for implementation, was gathered from members of NCC's faculty, administration, and students. Modifications to humanities, history, and social science courses were made. In conjunction with these activities, team members worked with the library staff to begin identifying works of ethnic or pluralistic importance. Project activities in the fall centered around service-learning. Other activities included a festival exploring Louisiana's cultures and presentations illustrating the diversity of the ethnic groups that comprise Louisiana. (HAA)

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Nunez Community College
Exploring America's Communities
Progress Report

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In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
(New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997)

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NUNEZ
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
3700 LaFontaine Street Chalmette, La 70043 • (504) 278-7440 • Fax: (504) 278-7463

EXPLORING AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES:
IN QUEST OF COMMON GROUND

Nunez Community College was established in St. Bernard Parish by the Louisiana legislature in 1992 as an open admission college. The College is located in a suburban area seven miles from the New Orleans Central Business District.

The racial composition of Nunez students is 84 percent white, 10 percent black, 1.6 percent Asian, 1 percent American Indian, and 2.6 percent Hispanic. This racial composition is more diversified than the population of St. Bernard Parish itself. As a result of Nunez's participation in the Louisiana Alliance for Minority Participation (LAMP) grant sponsored by the National Science Foundation and recruiting efforts, it is anticipated that minority enrollment will continue to increase.

Among the many cultures represented at Nunez are the Islenos, former Canary Islanders who migrated to the region in search of freedom; and the Acadians (Cajuns). More recently a great number of Asian-Americans have settled in this area. The predominately African-American lower Ninth Ward of Orleans Parish is also part of the College's service area.

The Action Plan for Nunez Community College was finalized at the conference in Los Angeles in March 1996 by team members Dr. Carol Jeandron, Charles Morton, and Barry Pike with the

assistance of mentor Dr. Max Reichard. The goal centered on providing the Nunez Community College community with opportunities to learn of the cultural diversity which exists in its midst and the commonalities which bind the people of all the diverse cultures together.

One objective established to accomplish this goal was to incorporate more emphasis on cultural diversity in existing courses. A second objective related to providing opportunities for Nunez Community College students to be exposed to various cultures by the scheduling of curriculum-related field trips and visits to a myriad of activities throughout the New Orleans Metropolitan Area. A third objective involved the inclusion of service-learning into the curriculum. Because of the cultural diversity of those in Nunez's service area, the existence of the service-learning component in selected courses would allow students and those in the community with whom they came in contact exposure to different cultures than their own.

In the months which followed, the team's pursuit of the project's goal was to take various forms. Much of what had been accomplished by the project's end was a direct result of acquiring early support from Dr. Carol Hopson, President; the Administration Council; the Academic Council; and the faculty of the Division of Arts and Sciences, who chose participation in this endeavor as a Divisional Goal for the 1996-97 academic year.

A Multicultural Advisory Committee was also established at the onset of the project. Members of the faculty, administration

and student body representing various cultures at Nunez volunteered to serve on the committee, whose tasks included recommending to the project team activities for implementation.

In the Fall 1996 semester, Cory Sparks, Instructor of History, joined the team. By the beginning of that semester, changes had already occurred as a result of Nunez's participation in the project. The Nunez Community College Catalog 1996-97 noted that service learning was an optional activity for students in sociology. Also, listed in the catalog was a new anthropology course "Human Evolution and Variation."

Also during that semester modifications to existing courses occurred. Courses in the humanities, history, and social sciences maximized the potential to accentuate the importance of pluralism in America through an exploration of multicultural themes. In Criminal Justice, for example, the focus was on the existence of a bifurcated Justice System which sets different standards of enforcement, adjudication, and punishment for different racial and ethnic groups.

In conjunction with modifications of the curriculum, team members worked with the library staff to begin identifying works of ethnic or pluralistic importance which would form the basis of a Multicultural Resource Collection. These works included books, magazines, journals, and audio-visual materials.

Project activities in the fall also centered around the initiation of service learning at Nunez. Sociology students had the option of performing service learning as part of the course activities. Students choosing this option worked in a variety of settings including battered women's clinics, elementary and

secondary schools, nursing homes, AIDS associations, hospitals, government offices, and mental health clinics. A reading of the journals, which were submitted by all students choosing the option of service learning, indicated that through these volunteer activities most students learned much about themselves and others. One student working with an AIDS association became a "buddy" to someone dying from the disease; the student later noted in his journal that the experience had changed his life forever.

The Multicultural Advisory Committee remained active throughout the semester. In its efforts to increase students' awareness of cultural diversity, the committee sponsored the festival "Exploring Louisiana's Cultures: An American Pie." Due to news media coverage, the festival became a community affair. One of the coordinators of the event stated that the festival's purpose was to show: "As diverse as we are, we are that similar."

To achieve that purpose, November 6th through the 15th, diners in the Nunez Cafe were treated to presentations which illustrated the diversity of the ethnic groups that comprise Louisiana. Each day featured a different Louisiana culture: Asian-American, African-American, Native American, Latin American, Cajun-French, Italian American, and St. Bernard Parish's own Canary Island (or "Islenos ") culture. The Culinary Department supplemented each day's events with a representative menu of the spotlighted culture's food. Activities were videotaped and will be preserved in the college's archives.

Throughout the endeavors connected with the project, mentor

Dr. Max Reichard provided assistance and encouragement to the team. This assistance took several forms including providing reading materials, concurring with plans regarding some activities, and "tactfully" suggesting the team reconsider others. His input and expertise were instrumental to Nunez's efforts. The team has appreciated his guidance and friendship.

At the end of the site visit in November, Dr. Reichard cautioned the team not to let the energy and vision invested in this project diminish. Thus, we look to the future and make plans which involve among other endeavors the continuation of the Multicultural Advisory Committee, the inclusion of service learning into other areas of the curriculum, the continued growth of the Multicultural Resource Collection in the library, and the implementation of planned field trips related to exposing students to diverse cultures.

We, the Nunez team connected with the project "Exploring America's Communities: In Quest of Common Ground," realize there is yet much to be done. We ended our application to participate in this project with the following: "The long lasting benefits to students, communities, states, and country are inherent in this project. Nunez Community College would appreciate the opportunity of contributing to the success of such an important endeavor." We have seen first hand the benefits of this project. We have greatly appreciated the opportunity provided to Nunez Community College and its constituents to participate in such an important endeavor.